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New York

President:	Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri	(India)
Members:	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Germany	Mr. Wittig
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Masood Khan
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	South Africa	Mr. Mashabane
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Parham
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3.45 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, who is joining today's meeting via video teleconference from the region.

I give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to brief the Council today on my three-day visit to Egypt, Israel, the occupied Palestinian territories and Jordan.

Since the situation in Gaza and Israel escalated last week, I made it my priority to contribute to efforts to halt the violence, with the priority aim of protecting civilians. I cancelled a previously planned trip to travel to the Middle East instead as a clear signal of the need for international diplomatic mobilization to prevent a further escalation that would put the whole region at risk, and to strengthen the commendable efforts, led by Egypt, to reach a ceasefire.

I warmly welcome today's ceasefire announcement. I commend the parties for stepping back from the brink, and I commend President Morsy of Egypt for his exceptional leadership. Our focus now must be on ensuring that the ceasefire holds and that all those in need in Gaza — and there are many — receive the humanitarian assistance they need.

It is a huge relief for the people of Gaza and Israel and for the international community that the violence is stopping, but we are all aware of the risks, and we are all aware that there are many details that must be solidified if a broad, durable ceasefire is to take firm hold over the longer term. It is imperative that both sides stick to the ceasefire in order to allow these underlying issues to be addressed in a sustainable fashion.

Today's announcement follows a week of devastating violence in southern Israel and Gaza, including the terror attack today on a bus in downtown Tel Aviv, which I strongly and immediately condemned. This brought us to an important moment, after a week of intensive diplomacy to reach a ceasefire. In that regard, I met with Egyptian President Morsy, League of Arab States Secretary-General Elaraby, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Palestinian President Abbas, Jordan's King Abdullah and Foreign Minister Judeh and many other leaders in each location, including the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Egypt, the Minister of Defence, the Foreign Minister and President of Israel, and Prime Minister Fayyad. I also met with United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton while in Jerusalem. I have just spoken with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel for a second time today.

My paramount concern throughout has been for the safety and well-being of all civilians, no matter where they are. Innocent people, including children, have been killed and injured on both sides. Families on both sides were forced to cower in fear as the violence raged around them. It pained me to be back here under circumstances similar to those that prevailed when I visited in 2009 during Operation Cast Lead. Recent events have been eerily reminiscent.

This morning, I heard from the United Nations team in Gaza. They reported on the impact of violence, including increased civilian casualties, which reached more than 139 Palestinians killed, more than 70 of them civilians, and more than 900 injured, with the displacement of 10,000 Gazans, who are now in 12 schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and two others run by local authorities. UNRWA has emphasized the critical need to support ongoing programmes on food assistance, health and sanitation, which are experiencing funding shortfalls and will now be burdened by having to support additional displaced persons. I am asking our emergency and humanitarian teams to be prepared to do whatever they can to alleviate the suffering.

Attacks on both sides continued today as the ceasefire approached. The bombing today in Tel Aviv injured 23 people, including three severely. The indiscriminate firing of rockets targeting Israel also continued. One long-range rocket landed in the outskirts of Jerusalem yesterday, with no injuries reported. Since 14 November, rocket fire has resulted in the deaths of four Israeli civilians, with 219 reported injured, most of them civilians. Three are in serious condition. One Israeli soldier was killed yesterday, and 16 Israeli soldiers have been wounded, one critically.

Overall, in the same period, more than 1,456 rockets have been fired from Gaza into Israel. One hundred and forty-two fell inside Gaza itself. Approximately 409 were intercepted by the Iron Dome anti-missile system. Ten Fajr-5 missiles were shot at Tel Aviv suburbs and the sea, five of which were intercepted by the Iron Dome system. Three long-range missiles hit the outskirts of Jerusalem, which is unprecedented.

Since Israel's targeted assassination from the air, on 14 November, of Ahmed Al-Jaabari, the chief of the military wing of Hamas, and with Israel's offensive in Gaza in its eighth day, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) publicly reported that it had conducted strikes against more than 1,450 targets in Gaza. Air strikes targeted sites across the Gaza Strip and included, but were not limited to, rocket-launching sites, military bases, police stations and tunnels along the border with Egypt.

The Israeli Air Force also targeted residential and office buildings that the IDF said belonged to members of Palestinian armed groups. Hundreds of buildings were hit by Israeli Air Force attacks. Media office and personnel of Al-Quds and Al-Aqsa television were targeted on 18 and 20 November, resulting in the deaths of three media professionals and injuries to 10 others.

I consistently condemn indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza into Israel. At the same time, I also believe that the excessive and disproportionate use of force that endangers civilian lives is intolerable. It is unacceptable for citizens on both sides to permanently live in fear of the next strike. Put simply, all parties must respect international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of all civilians at all times.

Earlier today, I travelled to Egypt for the second time this trip to support the ceasefire talks in the final phase taking place under the auspices of President Morsy, with the active support of several regional and international leaders. Visits of Foreign Ministers of several countries, including France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and many Arab countries were a further strong indication of the concerns of the international community and its shared goal of stopping the violence.

In my meeting with President Morsy only hours ago, he said that he was very close in his effort to achieve a ceasefire. He also reiterated the need to address the underlying issues of concern to both sides, so that the ceasefire could be sustainable. In addition, President Morsy expressed his concern that the comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, to which Egypt is committed, had not yet been achieved. I underscored the importance of President Morsy's efforts given his leadership and contacts with all sides.

I know that Palestinians and Israelis both have fundamental concerns about the status quo ante. As President Morsy said, those underlying issues need to be addressed. The United Nations is prepared to help to facilitate all efforts in that regard. But people are dying every day and cities are being targeted every day. The humanitarian crisis is growing exponentially the longer the crisis continues. We need the ceasefire now, followed immediately by negotiations on the underlying issues. That is the sequence that can save lives now.

The crisis underscored that the status quo is unsustainable and that long-term solutions must be found to the problems of Gaza, and for the Palestinians as a whole. Core elements of resolution 1860 (2009) remain unimplemented. Once calm is fully restored and the violence ends, a broader ceasefire will have to address all the underlying causes of conflict, including a full opening of the crossings, Palestinian reconciliation and an end to weapon-smuggling.

It is clear that the international community must speak with one voice to prevent a return to violence. I plan to keep in touch with world leaders, and I have asked my Special Coordinator, Robert Serry, to remain in Cairo to support the efforts to achieve a sustainable ceasefire.

Finally, let me conclude by stressing, as I have during all my discussions during this intense trip, that in these testing times, when the entire region is experiencing profound transformations, we must not lose sight of the fact that peace must remain our ultimate priority goal. Our devotion to a two-State solution ending a prolonged occupation and ending the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is more urgent than ever. Achieving that vision, which has been affirmed repeatedly by the Council, is long overdue and paramount to the stability of the region. Only a just, comprehensive peace can bring lasting security to all.

I am leaving shortly for New York. I wish the members of the Council a happy Thanksgiving.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.